

Chapter 1 Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Background

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is a federal agency responsible for purchasing, developing, and marketing electrical power to utility, industrial, and other customers in the Pacific Northwest, pursuant to the Bonneville Project Act of 1937, the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-501; the Northwest Power Act), and other statutes. BPA wishes to encourage the development of renewable energy resources in the Pacific Northwest to meet customer demand for power, to diversify its resource portfolio, and to meet its obligations under the Northwest Power Act.

Deregulation of the electric industry and subsequent energy supply issues, as well as the current low-water year, have emphasized the need for new and diverse energy sources in the region. Renewable resources like wind would not only help diversify BPA's resource portfolio, but are preferred by many consumers concerned about environmental effects of other power sources. BPA has developed and marketed output from renewable power projects as "green power" as a way to satisfy demand from these consumers and to increase the amount of new renewable energy resources in the region's power supply. The Northwest Power Planning Council's Fourth Conservation and Electric Power Plan recommended that Northwest utilities offer green power purchase opportunities as a way to help the region integrate renewable resources into the power system in the future.

In October 1999, SeaWest Windpower, Inc. (SeaWest) submitted a proposal to BPA to identify one or more sites in Oregon and Washington at which wind power facilities could be developed. After considering preliminary information regarding several sites identified by SeaWest, BPA decided to examine a proposed wind project located near Condon, Oregon, and to consider purchasing power from a wind power facility that would be constructed by SeaWest at the site.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. Sections 4321 et seq.) requires federal agencies to prepare and circulate an environmental impact statement (EIS) for major federal actions or decisions that could significantly affect the quality of the human environment, including the natural and physical environment.

BPA's decision whether or not to purchase power from the proposed wind project and transmit it over BPA transmission lines will consider the information in this EIS, public comments, and other factors.

This Draft EIS provides environmental information to the public and federal, state, and local agencies, officials, and decision makers regarding the effects of the proposed action. The Final EIS will respond to public and agency comments on this Draft EIS, and it will provide necessary clarifications, elaborations, and minor revisions to this draft.

1.2 Need for Action

In the face of regional growth in electrical loads and increasing constraints on the existing energy resource base, BPA needs to acquire resources that will contribute to diversification of the long-term power supply in the region.

1.3 Purpose of Action

The purposes of acquiring a diverse resource portfolio include:

- protecting BPA and its customers against risk;
- ensuring consistency with BPA's responsibility under the Northwest Power Act to encourage the development of renewable energy resources;
- meeting customer demand for energy from renewable energy resources, thereby assuring consistency with BPA's Business Plan EIS (DOE/EIS-0183, June 1995) and Business Plan Record of Decision (ROD);
- ensuring consistency with the resource acquisition strategy of BPA's Resource Programs EIS (DOE/EIS-0162, February 1993) and ROD; and
- meeting the objective in the January 2000 Strategic Plan of BPA's Power Business Line to acquire at least 150 average megawatts (MW) of new renewable resources by the end of fiscal year 2006 in order to meet customer demand for new renewable resources.

1.4 Decisions to be Supported by the EIS

BPA will use this EIS to decide between two alternatives. The alternatives include the proposed action (executing a power purchase agreement with SeaWest for up to 49.8 MW of electrical energy from the proposed Condon Wind Project and authorizing transmission over BPA power lines) and the No Action Alternative. In addition, BPA may use this EIS for decisions regarding subsequent wind projects within the overall study area.

1.5 Documents Incorporated by Reference

The Northwest Power Act encourages the development of renewable resources within the Pacific Northwest and authorizes BPA to acquire resources that have potential for providing cost-effective service to the region. In February 1993, BPA published the Resource Programs EIS (RP EIS), a programmatic document that evaluates the environmental tradeoffs among generic resource types and the cumulative effects of adding these resources to the existing system. The analyses in the RP EIS supported BPA's April 22, 1993, ROD which chose the Emphasize Conservation Alternative. This alternative emphasizes conservation and efficiency improvements, supplemented by renewable and thermal resources, as the most cost-effective and environmentally responsible option for BPA's long-term conservation and generation resource acquisition objectives. As a renewable resource, the proposed project would implement one element of BPA's Emphasize Conservation Alternative.

In June 1995, BPA published its Business Plan EIS (BP EIS). This policy-level EIS, which addressed BPA's need for a business strategy to participate fully in the changing energy market, updated the analyses in the RP EIS and confirmed the importance of renewable resources in the regional energy portfolio. BPA's Business Plan ROD documented BPA's decision to be market-driven in its participation in the electric utility marketplace. Acquisition of renewable resources, such as the proposed wind project, is consistent with the decision to be market-driven.

All of these previous environmental documents are incorporated by reference into this Condon Wind Project EIS. This EIS is tiered to the previous programmatic and policy level EISs and evaluates the potential site-specific impacts from the proposed Condon Wind Project.

1.6 Scoping and Major Issues

Scoping refers to a time early in a project when the public has an opportunity to express opinions on which issues should be considered in an EIS. On July 5, 2000, BPA published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS and to conduct public scoping meetings for the proposed project. BPA developed a mailing list of persons, agencies, and organizations that would likely be interested or affected by the proposed project. Currently, the mailing list contains about 200 persons, agencies, and organizations.

On July 10, 2000, a letter was mailed to everyone on the list, explaining the project, the environmental process, and how to participate (see Appendix A). A comment sheet was included so individuals could mail their comments back to BPA. A news release was distributed on July 17 and a meeting notice, fact sheet, and comment form were inserted into the July 20 Condon Times-Journal. Project scoping meetings were held at the Arlington Municipal Building on July 19, 2000, and the Gilliam County Courthouse in Condon on July 20, 2000. Written and verbal comments on the project were collected at the public meetings.

Many issues were raised during the scoping process. Most people raised questions about the project design. They expressed support for wind power and the proposed project but wanted to know more about how it works. Other issues raised most often were the following:

- Socioeconomic impacts – how the project would affect local taxes, power rates and employment;
- Fish, wildlife, and vegetation – especially how the project would affect birds; and
- Land use/recreation – how the project would affect farming.

Comments received during the scoping period were used by environmental specialists in their environmental impact analyses and are addressed throughout this document.

Everyone on the mailing list will receive notice when the Draft EIS is available and how to comment on it. Everyone will also receive notice when the Final EIS and ROD are available.

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